



State of Utah

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF OIL, GAS AND MINING


m/037/043

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May 8, 2002

TO: Minerals File

FROM: Paul B. Baker, Reclamation Biologist 

RE: Site Inspections: International Uranium; Hecla Shaft, La Sal-Snowball, Pandora, and Redd Block IV Projects; M/037/043, M/037/026, M/037/012, M/037/046; San Juan County, Utah

Date of Inspection: May 1, 2002
Time of Inspection: about 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Conditions: Mostly clear, 50's, windy
Participants: Doug Jensen and Paul Baker, DOGM

Purpose of Inspection:

These sites are not active and hadn't been inspected in about four years, so we wanted to make sure they were still stable. In addition, the bond reviews are soon due, and we needed to become familiar with the sites.

Getting to the sites:

These mines are all near the town of La Sal and are not hard to find. To get to the La Sal, Snowball, and Pandora sites, go east past La Sal on SR 46 to where the highway curves to the north. At this point, there is a dirt road continuing east then turning south. After a short distance, there is another road heading east (left). The La Sal site is at this intersection. Take the road leading east, and it continues southeast then curves back to the north. Both the Pandora and Snowball sites are up the canyon and are visible from this point.

The Beaver Shaft is just north of the town of La Sal, and the headframe is easily visible from the town. There is one road leading north from the town. Take this road then turn west where it comes to a T. There is additional disturbance to the east of the T, and the entire road up from La Sal is included in the disturbed area.

To get to Redd Block IV, go about 2 miles east of La Sal on SR 46 and turn north toward the county gravel pits for about 1/2 mile. At this point, there is another road that leads east. Take this road for about 1/3 mile then take the dirt road leading north. The site is not much more than a couple of piles of dirt, and they are easily visible.

The Hecla Shaft is just south of SR 46 about three miles west of La Sal. There is a headframe, and it's hard to miss.

Observations:

The Beaver Shaft, La Sal, and Snowball sites are all under one permit, and these, together with Pandora, are interconnected underground. In addition to the main disturbances we looked at, there are several vent shafts and roads leading to the vent shafts scattered around the area that we did not see.

There has been some vandalism at every site except Redd Block IV where there is essentially nothing to vandalize. All of the portals and shafts we found were secure, and with the exception noted below, all of the sites were stable.

Permit M/037/026 includes both the La Sal and Snowball sites and the Beaver Shaft. At the Snowball site, there has been some erosion from the waste piles (Photo 1), and it appears some of this material has gotten into the drainage (Photo 2). Photo 3 shows some buildings at the Snowball Mine.

The Snowball and Pandora Mines are both in a canyon, and there would be limited space available to regrade the waste piles although there is some (Photo 4). In places where the waste was stable, there were perennial grasses, sweet clover, small burnett, and other forbs. This indicates the material has some capability of supporting vegetation if it is stable enough for the vegetation to become established. At the site east of the Beaver Shaft (Photo 5), there had been some cattle, and there was also quite a bit of vegetation establishment. It appeared from this that manure would help vegetation establishment on the waste if the waste is used as a growth medium.

Except for Redd Block IV, there was waste material of varying amounts at each of these sites. Redd Block IV consists of a concrete pad and some berms, two of which appear to have been built to form two settling ponds.

The La Sal, Beaver Shaft, Hecla Shaft, and Redd Block IV sites are all in more or less open areas. While this gives more room, it does not allow the operator to hide the waste by backfilling it against a canyon wall. Nevertheless, there should be ways of blending the waste material with surrounding slopes to make the areas look more natural.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

These sites have all been inactive for more than ten years, and the rules say the Division will require complete reclamation of a mine site when the operations have been suspended for more than ten years unless the operator appeals to the Board prior to the expiration of the ten-year period and shows good cause for a longer suspension period. If the operator does not want to reclaim these sites at this time they should notify the Division to schedule a board appearance and make an appeal. The Division's main concerns about allowing the operator to not reclaim these sites at this time will be based on whether the reclamation bonds are adequate, the sites are stable, and if there is any potential threat to public safety or to the environment.

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If the operator chooses to appeal to the board for an extension, the Division will schedule another visit to the sites. The additional inspections will be necessary to evaluate if the reclamation activities and quantities of material noted in the present bonds will be sufficient to reclaim each of the sites, as they exist today.

The operator should install a silt fence or straw bales in the drainage below the Snowball waste pile to reduce the amount of material getting into the drainage. Otherwise, we have no other long-term maintenance suggestions.

jb

cc: Denise Swankey, BLM
Terry Wetz, International Uranium
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ATTACHMENT

Photographs

**M/037/043, M/037/026, M/037/012, M/037/046
Hecla Shaft, La Sal-Snowball, Pandora, and Redd Block IV**



Photo 1. Waste pile at the Snowball Mine. Note the erosion.



Photo 2. Sediment below the waste pile at the Snowball Mine.



Photo 3. Buildings at the Snowball Mine.



Photo 4. Pandora Mine viewed from the Snowball Mine.



Photo 5. Disturbed area east of the Beaver Shaft.